

# 'I think we all felt she was going somewhere

**WOMEN:**  
Continued from D1

When Deputy Chief O'Sullivan was growing into her teens — before the thought of becoming a police officer even entered her mind — Angie Dickinson was glorifying the role of a policewoman on TV, as the fictional Sgt. Pepper Anderson.

The reality, however, was different.

The duties of a policewoman in Ottawa in the 1970s were less exciting and much more limited than on television. For the most part, women in blue were parking enforcement officers. On a good day, they might serve point duty, directing traffic around an accident scene. Or on a really big day, they might be assigned to check on rowdy youth in one of Ottawa's movie houses.

But in 1979, things began to change.

The first wave in Ottawa came that year with a class of cadets that included Jenny Edge, Lynda Gibson, Monique Ackland and Theresa Dunnigan.

Less than two years later, three more women arrived from the Ontario Police College in Aylmer: Val Hutt, Leslie Cochran and Sue Cardo, who never failed to stand out with her full head of blond hair, boundless enthusiasm, gift of the gab, and talent.

Twenty years later, when a head-hunting firm searched across Canada for a new Ottawa deputy chief last fall, it wound up coming home to hire Sue Cardo, who by then was Sue O'Sullivan. The appointment earned remarkably high approval from the executive and rank-and-file when announced in October.

"It wasn't just the membership not used to female officers, it was just as much the public not used to it," Deputy Chief O'Sullivan said in an interview at her top-floor office at police headquarters on Elgin Street.

This day the attire is business-like, blazer and slacks. Just as often, though, it's the blue uniform that policewoman Campbell never wore.

"As policewomen, we knew we would be scrutinized. Basically, men thought women shouldn't be on the job."

"You had to earn your legitimacy and the only way to do that was work hard and do the job."

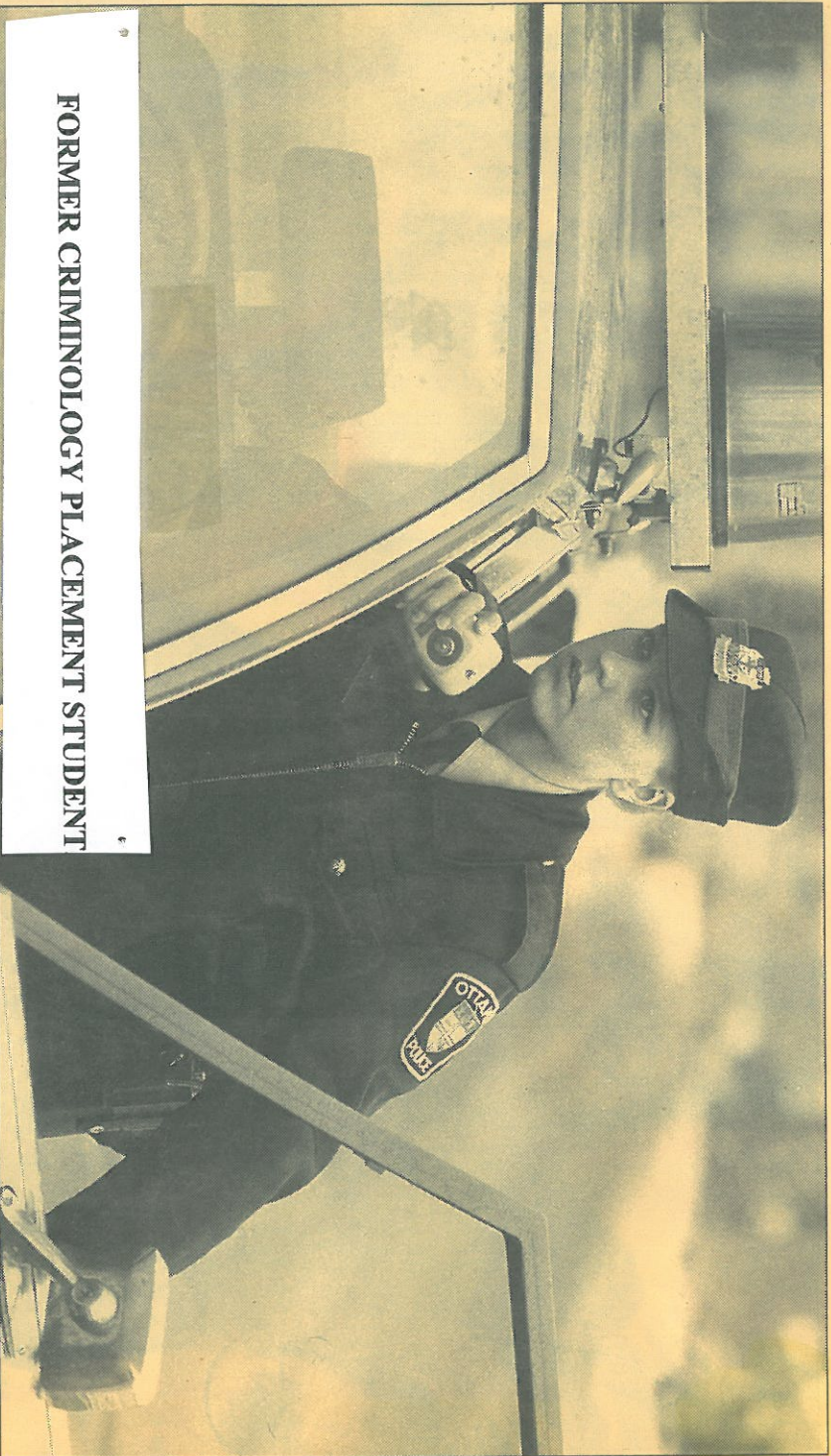
"You knew things were being said about you. But sometimes you just had to have a sense of humour and move on."

The young women coming up with Deputy Chief O'Sullivan were breaking ground at a time when the force was top-heavy with veteran male officers, many of them unreceptive to change. It was a difficult, and often chauvinistic, environment.

Until then, officers in Ottawa had to be at least five foot 10 and 160 pounds; requirements few women met. (In order to hire more women, the standard was dropped in the late 1970s to 5 foot 4 and 120 pounds.)

If a female officer married or had a child, she was off the force. And she would be judged differently on the job.

It took time for male officers to accept that a female might arrive as his backup at a shooting



FORMER CRIMINOLOGY PLACEMENT STUDENT

Sue O'Sullivan of the Ottawa police in 1982, above, and as she appears today as deputy chief.

"My parents instilled a strong work ethic," she said. "Dad said: 'If you want something, go out and get it.'"

"And the golden rule was if you could help somebody, help. We were also taught the difference between right and wrong." She played a little basketball and volleyball at St. Raymond's Junior High, before moving on to Laurentian High School. All along, her goal was to fly airplanes, which was fine by her parents.

"We tried to instill in our daughters to be leaders, not followers, and always be their own person," Mr. Cardo said when his daughter was named deputy chief. "We always had confidence in her. She was a doer."

In Grade 11, during a career day at Laurentian, her ambition took a profound turn. A police officer told students about his job; her goal of flying was grounded on the spot.

She doesn't remember the officer's name or exactly what he said. Only that it changed her goals and she went straight home to tell her folks. After a little career counselling, she headed to Carleton University to study criminology — she even skipped her graduation ceremony to head off to police college.

Her police career began where it starts for every other rookie: on the streets, doing foot patrol in Platoon A in downtown Ottawa.

It meant checking the doors of small businesses along Sparks, Elgin or Bank streets, walking through dark alleys to check on potential trouble spots, and making sure there was no trouble at downtown night spots, some of which didn't have the best of reputations.

It was lonely. It was sometimes scary. It was often exciting.

To this day, Deputy Chief O'Sullivan always drives with her car window down because of an old veteran named Skippy Davidson.

"He told me if you don't have your window down how can you hear something going on?" she said. "He also taught me about peripheral vision, the importance of being able to actu-

ally see what was going on around you. It's simple. But it's important."

In fact, Const. Davidson gave his partner another big lesson one night as the two responded to a robbery at Bank and Argyll. Two suspects were escaping when Const. Davidson dropped her off at the front of the store and she did what any officer would do: she ran after them. Only she thought it a little odd that her partner wasn't helping with the pursuit.

But by the time she chased them out from the alley, Const. Davidson was waiting at the other end with the patrol car door wide open, waiting for the suspects, as if to say "hop in."

"He taught me the importance of street sense." Deputy Chief O'Sullivan said her being on patrol didn't always sit well with her father, who was nervous about her safety, but her mother had total confidence in her daughter.

And they couldn't wait to hear if anything exciting had occurred on her shift.

"At that point, everything I encountered was a story," said Deputy Chief O'Sullivan. "When you're a rookie, you take home everything. I couldn't wait to tell them."

At the same time her career was starting, she also had another interest in her life: John O'Sullivan. The two met while teens, later married and had two children.

Motherhood, in fact, was another milestone for the "originals," Staff Sgt. Ackland was the first of the group to become a mother, and Deputy Chief O'Sullivan the second, with daughter Katie, now 15. Three years later, along came Jonathan, now a strapping 12-year-old minor hockey player.

The marriage didn't last, though the shared commitment to the children did. About the marriage, Deputy Chief O'Sullivan says only that without the support of her ex-husband, she might never have been able to chase her dream to advance as a police officer. Her greatest achievement? "It's my two children, without a doubt," she said.

The O'Sullivans have a joint-parenting arrangement that gives the children alternate weeks with their parents. On weeks she doesn't have the children, it allows her long hours at the office, often working late into the night, preparing strategies, studying reports and catching up.

During the weeks the children are with her, the time spent in the office is more regular. It works, she says.

On the job, Deputy Chief O'Sullivan's career has covered many areas. She's been on patrol, she has served on special projects, dealt with the public and the media. She has also worked with other emergency services.

Officers on the street respect her — and not just because she is one of their bosses.

Just this past New Year's Eve, she was at home riding in a patrol car on downtown streets, interacting with other officers on duty to keep revellers in the Byward Market under control.

She knows what it's like to stand beneath the Bank Street bridge on a cold winter night trying to talk a suicidal man out of jumping. She was successful the first time.

But a few days later, again while she was on duty, the man was back on the bridge and couldn't be dissuaded. The rope he had tied around his neck broke, he hit the ice below and broke some bones. He survived.

She's been to crack houses in Vanier as tactical-unit officers have stormed into an apartment looking for a fugitive with guns. She's been the first officer to arrive on scenes of fatal accidents; she's had to tell relatives of the death of a loved one.

"Inspiration can often be someone who has faced tragedy and handled it," said Deputy Chief O'Sullivan.

"Most people join because they want to help. Sometimes the reward can be the simplest of things."

She's also been there dealing with youths running afoul of the law and street violence and she's talked with community

groups to find out police needs might be to ensure elderly feel safe outside the night.

"I loved the opera learned a great deal as a duty inspector best learning experience Manual on Assault."

She's also dealt with children who are abused.

In that area, Deputy Sullivan has either co-authored several including what has been manual of the 1995 work entitled *ence Manual on Assault*.

Several of her used at police academy solicitor general, Canadian Mount the Justice Department are used by police abroad, including how to interview children who are victims. Despite the serious job, Deputy Cardo hasn't lost her humour. She can even remember when it was geous being all of a kind and female.

Once, she went to fight between two side a Bank Street. "The one guy was and just as he did, I said 'You can't hit woman.' And he said 'That's what I paid off being a fer Other than her going from silver the promotion to whole lot appeared changed about Deputy O'Sullivan and then seen by her fellow She's still "Sue" to "From the time was seconded to the Police College, I think she was going some Det. Edge.

"Sue has always — and I don't mean the point of view of contest. It's just the ways treated people have never got a sense ever changed."

As deputy, she criminal investigators and support services court liaison, and response services. take direction from the executive and to the Police Service.

"Now there are make for which the map," said Deputy Ivan. "I love being change."

She also loves being able to help others achieve their goals in the force, the way "I love the idea of it yourself. That have had to learn: have to get people "I talk with about where they two years, in five years. I want to be there."

By doing so, I O'Sullivan is in continuing the Campbell began and honouring the by Ottawa's first p